

13 Monteverdi studies and ‘new’ musicologies

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Monteverdi studies have been associated with the so-called ‘new musicology’ since the first time the latter was mentioned in print, in a column reviewing the 1991 meeting of the American Musicological Society for the *New York Times*.¹ Papers on Bob Dylan, desire in Skryabin, reflections of Nazi ideology in German musicology during the Second World War, and the gendered rhetoric of the Monteverdi/Artusi controversy served the author as signs of

of a gradual transformation of . . . musicology . . . The new musicology . . . turns . . . to the movements that dominate literary studies, . . . not primarily interest in aesthetic issues . . . they might focus on the social implications of a work, or . . . how a work reveals the artists’ position in society or argues for a particular view of sexuality and power.

Using the phrase ‘new musicology’ three more times as he cautiously welcomed a ‘classic paradigm shift’, the writer conferred the status of a movement on an eclectic group of papers whose authors had never met. Yet the label, and the sense that it referred to some kind of movement, stuck. It was in part because the Monteverdi paper sparked criticism when it was published, leading the author to compare ‘new musicology’ to the ‘second practice’, that the label ‘new musicology’ has had a special resonance in Monteverdi studies.² This essay will survey the intersections of Monteverdi studies with the new approaches to music scholarship that emerged, mainly in the United States, over the last twenty years. Characterised by successive efforts to assimilate the newest insights and methods of other disciplines, the phenomenon might be better described as an ‘interdisciplinary’ or ‘critical turn’ in musicology, rather than as any single ‘new’ musicology.

Critical turns: new criticism, new historicism, feminism

Three of the most important Monteverdi scholars of the last quarter century, Gary Tomlinson, Ellen Rosand and Susan McClary, were among the first musicologists of any sort to make these turns. In the early 1980s, Tomlinson

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criticism' (close reading of a text without considering any contexts) and 'new historicism' (seeking to understand the 'cultural work' of a text – its ways of addressing cultural anxieties – in its original historical context).³ Tomlinson began where Nino Pirrotta's interest in Monteverdi's poetic choices left off.⁴ Taking account of the literary fashions and critical perspectives that would have been part of Monteverdi's intellectual world ('new historicism'), Tomlinson used close reading ('new criticism') to decipher how Monteverdi might have read the poems he set.⁵ Tomlinson thus produced a new way of thinking about the 'via naturale all'imitatione' that was to make Monteverdi's recitative soliloquies so compelling to posterity. Developing his ideas in a subsequent book, Tomlinson argued that Monteverdi was at his best when he read poetry as a humanist – and at his worst when, later in life, he read with the surface-obsessed sensibility associated with the poet Giambattista Marino.⁶ Tomlinson's critical work articulated in new terms the long-standing perception that Monteverdi had straddled a paradigm shift in Western music, reinvigorating scholarly interest in the word/music question and in the ways its answers might illuminate Monteverdi's importance. The ongoing interest in applying literary and linguistic theory to Monteverdi's musical texts – notably of Jeffrey Kurtzman and Mauro Calcagno – can be traced to Tomlinson's literary turn.⁷

Ellen Rosand's 1985 article 'Seneca and the interpretation of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*'⁸ combined close reading and a fuller engagement with new historicism into a model for interpreting early opera critically that young scholars continue to emulate. Rosand meticulously historicised Gian Francesco Busenello's libretto for *Poppea*, linking it to specific concerns of Venice's Accademia degli Incogniti, to which he belonged. She showed how Busenello made the character of Seneca figure those concerns, so that despite his obvious human flaws Seneca became the moral centre on which the opera's morally problematic plot turns. Turning to close reading of Monteverdi's music, Rosand wrote from the assumption that Monteverdi's focus was more on the representation of credible human characters than on the representation of language that had been Tomlinson's concern: in her view, Monteverdi had shaped characters from the details of musical speech he created for them. The result was an interpretation that read *Poppea* as a whole, much as a literary critic might read *Hamlet*, and that showed how *Poppea* addressed important issues of its time. Rosand thus opened the field for alternative readings of *Poppea* and other early operas that treat them both as aesthetic objects and as historical evidence about the concerns of a particular cultural and historical moment.⁹ Moreover, her work sparked ongoing interest in how Monteverdi engaged problems of representation.

Two essays in Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* marked the most dramatic emergence of a 'new musicology' in Monteverdi studies, piquing traditional scholars' fascination and ire in ways that Tomlinson's and Rosand's dalliance with new historicism did not. What was so new about McClary's approach? First, the notes to her essays suggest breathtakingly wide interdisciplinary reach, encompassing references to Bakhtin, Barthes and Bourdieu on the one hand to feminist critics like Catherine Clément, Sandra Gilbert, Ann Rosalind Jones, Kaja Silverman and Gayatri Spivak on the other. McClary's sweeping eclecticism burst musicology's disciplinary boundaries and redefined what might count as historicist study of music. Although she cited not a single archival document or 'primary' musicological source, the material McClary did cite enabled her to historicise early modern gender norms, as a background against which to read Monteverdi's creation of various musical rhetorics to represent a range of early modern gender positions – the sexually innocent and musically unfocused Euridice; the sexually active and musically goal-directed Proserpina; the seductive and musically masterful Poppea; the powerful yet, in his emotional extravagance, faintly effeminate Orfeo. By her ability to link immediately audible details to late twentieth-century intellectuals' ideas about early modernity, McClary made Monteverdi's music intelligible, as art and as history, to a wider public than early-music scholars usually reach.

Second, McClary's essays introduced musicologists to the notion that both gender and sexuality are historically and culturally specific constructs. On the face of it, this notion seems unproblematic: gender and sexuality are historically specific ways of interpreting certain physically observable 'facts' about animals' bodies, just as modality and tonality are historically specific ways of interpreting physically observable 'facts' about the properties of sound. Yet the very phrase 'constructions of gender' destabilised a fundamental premise of twentieth-century musicology. If Monteverdi's representations of gendered human beings could be understood as deliberately crafted in response to cultural norms about gender we no longer share (so that his characters would be intelligible to his contemporaries), then it followed that some aspects of his music were neither 'universal' nor 'transcendent'. Thus McClary challenged one of the foundations of traditional music history: the belief that some musical works, by some composers, merit performance and study because they communicate human truths that transcend their conditions of origin. After McClary, it would be harder to sustain the belief that a scholar's or a critic's work was to explore and explicate Monteverdi's unquestioned, trans-historical genius.

Third, it follows from the idea that gender and sexuality are constructed, that whatever we might have thought to understand directly

about Orfeo or Arianna, Seneca or Poppea, might be a misunderstanding based in late-modern or post-modern assumptions. No matter how carefully we had reconstructed Monteverdi's reading habits, his poetic choices or the political agendas of his librettists, unless we also understood the social structures of his time we could not grasp the meanings his characters projected to his first listeners. McClary's work thus exponentially raised the standards for new historicist scholarship on Monteverdi. After her, to write credibly about Monteverdian matters touching on gender or sex would require that musicologists come to terms with the large body of historical and critical scholarship on early modern ideas of gender, sex and embodiment, as well as with literary, theatrical and musical histories. Further, it would become increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that real bodies – both early modern ones and late twentieth- or twenty-first-century ones – were involved in the performance and representation of some highly sexualised texts ('Si, ch'io vorrei morire' (SV89), for example), and consequently increasingly difficult to ignore the implications for real, embodied persons of musical texts that represent sexual violence or betrayal ('Eccomi pront'ai baci' (SV135), or the laments of Arianna and the nymph of 'Non avea Febo ancora recato il di' (SV163)).

These three points amounted to a revolution in musicology, not just in Monteverdi studies. But McClary's was not a total revolution. The Monteverdian essays in *Feminine Endings* develop their argument from three assumptions that had long pervaded Monteverdi studies. First, for McClary, as for Tomlinson and Rosand, Monteverdi's musical constructions seem to respond to forces that are easily described in language; thus music remains the *serva* of culture, notwithstanding its dominion over listeners' feelings. Second, like Tomlinson, McClary sees Monteverdi's musical *oeuvre* as straddling two 'orders of things': she explores the relatively early *Orfeo* as a document of late Renaissance ideas about gender in relation to rhetoric and sees in the late *Poppea* an example of different gender/rhetorical norms. Third, McClary's argument is wholly grounded in the assumption that musical meaning is discerned by listening to music, rather than by making it. Still, her work raised important questions. How did the rhetorical prowess represented as a male privilege in early opera come to be reassigned mainly to female characters by the 1640s? How did representations of rhetorically extravagant women come to envoice complaints against inappropriate power? Could representations of women, or instances of real women's vocality, have functioned as resistance to patriarchal authority? These were questions others would take up in the 1990s, often with arguments made partly through interpretations of Monteverdi's music.

After 1993: analysis, performance, historiography and criticism

Monteverdi studies flourished in the 1990s and the first years of this century, sparked in part by commemorations of the 350th anniversary of his death.¹⁰ Much new work emerged from premises quite independent of the United States' fashion for critical readings, but new ideas about analysis, performance, historiography and the relationship of music to gender, sexuality and embodiment increasingly informed each other, speeding the progress of Monteverdi studies' critical turn. 'Close', 'new historicist' and 'feminist' critical readings of Monteverdi's music were both enabled and enriched by new musical analytical models introduced in the 1990s. An ongoing problem for scholars of early seventeenth-century music is the lack of a single unifying theory: much of the repertoire seems to hover between modal and tonal organisation.¹¹ In 1992, Eric Chafe's *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* proposed a way of describing the pitch organisation of Monteverdi's music in terms of hexachord, system and mode that has come to be generally accepted in the United States.¹² Chafe used his own descriptions as the basis for provocative close readings of many madrigals from the Fourth and Fifth Books, and of the 'tonal allegories' of such larger works as *Orfeo*, the *Ballo delle ingrate*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*, and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. In 1993, Tim Carter and Geoffrey Chew each used a kind of layer analysis derived from Schenkerian techniques to support, respectively, points about the possible meanings of 'aria' in early seventeenth-century music and the Neoplatonic implications of Monteverdi's rhythmic and modal procedures in the Eighth Book of Madrigals.¹³ Echoing the much earlier analytical work of Susan McClary's dissertation, their methods enabled close readings of Monteverdi's music that were entirely independent of the *oratione* (the rhetorical standpoint, or the words) that, the composer had claimed, commanded his musical choices as a *padrona* would her *serva*.¹⁴ The same year Jeffrey Kurtzman produced a close reading of the Eighth Book's 'Or che'l ciel e la terra' that took seriously the taxonomic impulse of Monteverdi's preface and showed how Monteverdi might have used an equally taxonomic reading of Petrarch's poem to produce the madrigal's surprisingly varied, but coherent large-scale form.¹⁵ More recently, Anthony Pryer has used an inspired combination of historical and analytical study to show how Monteverdi reworked excerpts from *Orfeo* in the Sixth Book madrigal 'Zefiro torna e'l bel tempo rimena' (SV108). While none of this work sutures Monteverdi's music to a social context, as critical musicologists try to do, it does shed remarkable light on Monteverdi's compositional process.¹⁶

The last fifteen years have seen a steady expansion of knowledge about such things as tunings, cleffing, transposition, string technique, options for continuo practice and the physical spaces and ritual functions of some canonic Monteverdi works.¹⁷ Immensely helpful to both performers and scholars by allowing us richer, more carefully historicised notions of how this music sounded, little of this work explicitly engaged the intellectual revolutions of critical musicology. An important exception is the work of Richard Wistreich. His 1994 article, ‘*La voce e grata assai, ma . . .*: Monteverdi on singing’ brought both vocal expertise and post-modern scepticism to bear on a wide range of early seventeenth-century descriptions of singers, yielding a nuanced survey of vocal tastes and of the cultural meanings that might have been ascribed to different kinds of voices.¹⁸ Although not specifically about Monteverdi, Wistreich’s more recent work must be counted as among the first examples of music scholarship to assimilate successfully Judith Butler’s theory that identity is performative (brought into being by repeated actions understood to constitute a social category), McClary’s notion that music can construct social identities, and a rigorous reconstruction of historical conditions from primary sources.¹⁹

More than any other scholar, Gary Tomlinson was responsible for introducing new historiographical methods into Monteverdi studies. His *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* advocated adapting anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s method of ‘thick description’ to the study of early music, although Tomlinson’s own range of cultural reference, while rich, did not extend very far outside the traditional literary sources.²⁰ In his next book, however, Tomlinson’s thought took the anthropological turn more sharply. *Music and Renaissance Magic* focuses on music as a cultural practice, rather than as a set of autonomous works created by exceptional individuals. Almost all the music Tomlinson mentions was improvised with the intention of effecting real – if ‘magical’ – change in the world; ephemeral, this music was locked forever in a realm of inef-fable, time-bound performances that seem impervious to historical knowledge.²¹ Not at all concerned with this music’s aesthetic qualities, Tomlinson sought instead to understand an aspect of Renaissance musical culture profoundly foreign to the modern sensibility, and thus to de-familiarise the parts of that culture that twentieth-century scholars believed we understood. Monteverdi’s music figured only toward the end of the book, when Tomlinson revisited his own critical readings of ‘Sfogava con le stelle’ (Fourth Book of Madrigals) and the Lamento della Ninfa (Eighth Book) in terms of his argument that magical thinking had been an unspoken assumption of ‘Renaissance’ culture that was rapidly disappearing by the 1630s. These examples ensured that Tomlinson’s ideas

about both magic and music historiography became touchstone concerns of Monteverdi scholarship – if often contested ones.

Theoretically dense, *Music and Renaissance Magic* introduced Monteverdians to three ideas from the work of the French historian Michel Foucault, each of which diminishes the centrality of individual composers and individual works. 'Archaeology' reads the traces that survive from the past to detect levels of meaning unavailable to the people who produced those traces.²² Directly opposed to hermeneutics, which seeks to decipher (not only detect) the meanings in specific texts, archaeology opposes both close and historicist readings. 'Genealogy' is the history of the position of the subject; it accounts for the constitution of knowledges and discourses without positing the existence of a 'transcendental' subject who could be imagined as outside discourse: the knowing (or reading, composing, performing) subject is understood to have been formed by the knowledges and discourses in which she or he might, as an artist or a scholar, intervene.²³ Because both knower (say, a performer-scholar) and known (say, a Monteverdi madrigal) have been formed differently by discourse, knowledge itself is a relationship suffused with power and difference – not a set of discoverable facts. An 'episteme' is the historically specific set of *a priori* assumptions on which knowledge is based in a given time or place. These assumptions, detectable by archaeology, will most often not be part of any knower's (or artist's) conscious thought: they are taken for granted, as 'the order of things'.²⁴ Tomlinson's *Music in Renaissance Magic* capitalised on Foucault's notion that some time near the start of the seventeenth century a modern 'episteme of representation' (in which the relationship between, say, signs and signifiers was, by definition, the product of arbitrary, temporary artifice) and a pre-modern 'episteme of resemblance' (in which everything in the 'world' was conceived as related to everything else in a seamless web of existence and in which play with the intrinsic resemblances between, say, a musical mode, a planet and a word or thought could produce effects of power). Although it was not Tomlinson's point, his book can leave a reader interested in Monteverdi with the impression that the composer was not a transcendental subject, but a historically contingent one, formed by one Foucauldian episteme, who lived through – and contributed to – the transition to another.

Although Tomlinson's third book, *Metaphysical Song*, has little to say about Monteverdi, Monteverdi scholars must nonetheless reckon with its arguments.²⁵ Following up on Tomlinson's anthropological and Foucauldian turns, the book traces the history of 'the hearing of the operatic voice as a medium putting its listeners in touch with invisible, supersensory realms'.²⁶ Tomlinson puts some familiar narratives of opera

history in touch with equally familiar narratives of intellectual history, choosing the points of contact strategically so as to show the relationship between profound shifts in metaphysics and concepts of subjectivity on the one hand, and shifts in the way singers, composers and listeners have understood the theatricalised voice of opera on the other. *Metaphysical Song* is controversial. In his focus on metaphysics, and on ‘song’ as a noun rather than ‘singing’ as a verb form, Tomlinson can seem to have transported music into the realm of pure thought. The book can seem to dismiss the meanings that might attach, consciously or not, to the act of singing – one of the most complex and culturally variable actions a human body can perform. Moreover, although Foucauldian method shows ways to evade entrapment in the myths of ‘great composer’, ‘great works’ and transcendental mastery, in practice Tomlinson’s essay falls back on works, composers and indeed, philosophers that his readers already know, re-inscribing a set of gendered and classed structures of knowledge and power that many post-modern intellectuals strive to dismantle. Nonetheless, Tomlinson’s essay points to the interpretative possibilities that arise from a Foucauldian approach to two preoccupations of Monteverdi studies – the relationship between language (culture) and music and the almost magical properties attributed to the act of singing by those who listen.

Among the strongest threads of ‘new musicology’ in Monteverdi studies are those that explored the relationships linking the composer’s music to issues of gender, sexuality and embodiment. This strand of scholarship might casually be called ‘feminist’, as its correlate is in literary studies, but many of its musical exponents eschew the self-consciously political stance the word implies. Inspired by Susan McClary’s work, their authors often drew methodologically on traditional history, Rosand’s new historicism or Tomlinson’s anthropological turn to explore representations or performances of femininity, and to recover the contributions performers had made to the musical traces associated with Monteverdi’s name. For example, Beth Glixon used archival documents to develop a vivid picture of the material conditions of singers’ lives from Anna Renzi (Octavia in the first production of *Poppea*) to Giulia Masoti, active in the late 1660s. Reading singers’ contracts straightforwardly but shrewdly, Glixon showed that by Masoti’s generation, women singers could dictate terms to composers and librettists.²⁷ Thus, Glixon shows a material side of the seventeenth-century trend to represent some women’s voices as powerful and resistant, to which McClary had already drawn attention. A rich conversation developed around McClary’s notion that the lament was a feminine genre. I combined new historicism with close reading to interpret Monteverdi’s lament for Arianna in relation to

early modern prescriptive culture on womanhood, and to argue that the lament's repeated performance by female amateurs transformed the lament itself into prescriptive culture – an occasion for women to practice such patterns of behaviour as ferocious but futile rage and self-silencing.²⁸ Tim Carter used traditional historical method to consider the possibility that the lament might have been as much improvised by Virginia Ramponi Andreini as composed by Monteverdi.²⁹ Using historical anthropology (rather than Foucauldian archaeology) Anne MacNeil rediscovered the ritual function of laments to mark the liminality in rites of passage, especially marriages, as well as the use of laments in training young boys for rhetorical power. Both uses have implications for the utility of the constructed 'feminine' in early modern Italian culture.³⁰ Working from performativity theory, Bonnie Gordon argued that the very sound of a woman's voice in the lament-like recitative that ends the *Ballo delle ingrato* resisted the ritual intention to silence women.³¹ More recently, Rachel Lewis has broken through the implicit notion that gender-sensitive readings are mainly of interest to women, showing the usefulness of such reading to address the attribution problems of *Poppea* from a critical rather than a source-studies perspective.³²

Four recent monographs exemplify the range and sophistication that both critical and traditional musicology can reach. Tim Carter's *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre* profits from the author's ubiquity in the field of Monteverdi studies over the last generation: there has been no novelty of analysis, historiography or critical perspective to which Carter has not responded, and few that he has not actively fostered.³³ His book synthesises traditionally gathered historical material about theatrical production norms, genres, libretti, sources and so forth, with critical readings of Monteverdi's principal theatrical works that are perspicacious, provocative, and, most importantly, pertinent to both performers and audiences. Massimo Ossi's methodologically traditional *Divining the Oracle* addresses two long-standing nodes of Monteverdi scholarship – the composer's straddling of traditional and modern musical worlds, and the relationship, in his compositions and verbal thought, between *oratione* and music.³⁴ Reading letters and music against each other, Ossi shows Monteverdi to have actively embraced (if not created) his position as music's leading modernist; to have consciously engaged questions of genre and large-scale musical design throughout his life; to have been more interested in music's ability to communicate affect than its ability to serve language *per se*; and, through skilled use of *ostinati* and *ritornelli*, to have arrived at a conception of musical communication that held the claims of music and text in equilibrium. Wendy Heller's erudite *Emblems of Eloquence* uses Rosand's methods to answer McClary's questions about

representations of women in seventeenth-century opera.³⁵ Heller reconstructs from primary sources the discourse on womanhood that circulated in early modern Venice, and the ways that discourse interacted with the Republic's political self-fashioning. Her chapter on the character of Octavia in *Poppea* is a fine example of her historicist achievement: she painstakingly recovers the conceptions of Nero's queen that circulated in the classical Roman literature and history that mid-century Venetians knew and deftly shows how Monteverdi's compositional decisions can be seen as choices among them, further analysing the diva Anna Renzi's contribution to the character's first reception. Finally, Bonnie Gordon's *Monteverdi's Unruly Women* brings ideas from McClary, Tomlinson and others to bear on the issue named in her book's subtitle – 'the power of song in early modern Italy'.³⁶ Gordon's book is not ultimately about Monteverdi. For her, the composer is a rhetorical convenience – the creator of relatively well-known works through which to explore the relationships that link musical behaviours to the rest of the world. Gordon's focus is on women's bodies as understood in the medical literature, common sense, erotic imaginings and fantasies of difference that circulated in Monteverdi's time and on the ways that singing of and/or about embodied women would have been understood by both singers and listeners in early modern culture. Subtly contesting Tomlinson's emphasis on the metaphysical, Gordon produces historicised readings of Monteverdi works that privilege the physical force of the sounds that came from women's throats, showing how and when those sounds might have been perceived to contest patriarchal authority, how and when they may have helped to articulate the shift of episteme through which she, like so many others, believes Monteverdi lived.

Unanswered questions

Like McClary and Tomlinson, Heller and Gordon move away from the idea that a critical musicologist's work would be to explore and explicate instances of Monteverdi's genius, although they leave intact the curious disembodiment (and apparent independence from material, quotidian realities) that music historians have long conferred on 'great composers'. If the explication of a transcendental subject's genius is not our work and if, for better or worse, helping to solve source and performance-practice quandaries never was – what is the use of critical musicology's work on Monteverdi? 'Monteverdi' provides these authors and many others with a well-known repertoire through which to propose new critical or historiographical methods; to probe music's relationship to modern

subjectivity; to explore ways that the music of another time and place might illuminate our understanding of historical others' experience. Finally, these authors invite us to contemplate the reasons that this music, produced by a set of unspoken beliefs about knowledge, power and sound very different from our own, should continue to move us. That might be agenda enough to ensure an ongoing stream of scholarship, some of it interesting to performers and audiences.

The four papers chosen by the *New York Times* fifteen years ago to exemplify a 'new musicology' represented four themes it was poised to develop further – musical desire, popular culture, scholarly ideology and music's imbrication with gender; only two of those, desire and gender, have been much explored by Monteverdi scholars. But the recent essays of Andrew dell'Antonio and Iain Fenlon tracing the uses of Monteverdiana to Italian fascism invite curiosity about the liveliness – indeed, the dominance – of Anglo-American scholarship on Monteverdi in recent years.³⁷ How has that liveliness interacted with the social, economic and political transformations engendered by Anglo-American 'neo-liberalism' since the Thatcher–Reagan alliance of the 1980s or with the delicate relationship between Anglo-American Monteverdi enthusiasts and Italy's early-music communities, both performing and scholarly, and the equally delicate relationships linking both to the artistic self-fashionings of the new Europe? To what extent might such political questions be implicated in the rise of distinctive, seemingly national, styles of performing Monteverdi's music, each appealing directly to potential listeners' identifications or disidentifications with contemporary pop? Might they be implicated in the startling critical inattention to Monteverdi's sacred music? Might these or similarly self-reflexive questions illuminate critical musicology's odd inattention to representations of sexual violence, class antagonism, ethnic tension and empire and perhaps prompt a new burst of scholarship, both historicist and critical, in just these areas, along with newly conceived performances?

How might thinking about Monteverdi's constructions of sexual and ethnic violence illuminate the ways both 'difference' and 'violence' itself were understood in early modern Mantua and Venice? Based on what we know about where, when and how these representations were performed, what can we say about this music's role in either resisting or inscribing particular patterns of violence in the modern sensibility? How might these representations satisfy our own expectations about the place of violence, and narratives of violence, in musical pleasure or aesthetic experiences? Could we imagine producing *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* now as Luciano Berio meant to in the 1960s, as an anti-war gesture? Or does the *Combattimento* instead outline exactly the volatile

mingling of sexual, ethnic and religious arrogance (the fear, loathing and love of a particular other) from which Anglo-American culture's current imbroglis in the Middle East have sprung? Might the *Combattimento* have become the most important of Monteverdi's works to study from critical and widely historicising perspectives, and the most inflammatory?

But there may be still deeper questions to be asked. Almost all the new work on Monteverdi to have emerged in the last fifteen years, critical or not, has remained tethered to three premises: 1) that Monteverdi lived through the transition from one episteme (or paradigm, or poetic sensibility) to another; 2) that the relationship between words (or culture) and music was most easily figured as a binary, whether hierarchical or, in Ossi's conception of it, complementary; and 3) that the primary means of experiencing music – as aesthetic pleasure, knowledge/power, or meaning – is through listening. The latter two, and perhaps all three, can easily seem to manifest the presence of the 'episteme of representation' in modern thought about music. This is an episteme in which music is . . . only music and not a force that can make things happen in the world, nor a means by which to know what the other, language-bound disciplines of cultural inquiry cannot decipher. Yet the episteme of representation has been disintegrating since Foucault named it in 1966, shortly before the four-hundredth anniversary of Monteverdi's birth. Evidence that the process extends to musical culture includes the rapidly successive interdisciplinary turns of musicology in recent years. The focus on performance and performativity (exemplified by Wistreich and Gordon), on the continuum linking music to a soundscape (exemplified in early modern studies by the work of Bruce Smith), on the opacity of musical events to either hermeneutic or archaeological scrutiny (argued by Carolyn Abbate) seem to be leading us right out of the episteme of representation, toward an episteme in which music *is* a force.³⁸ It is hard even to imagine what the emerging episteme might be; but it seems likely that by the time we come to celebrate the four-hundredth anniversary of Monteverdi's death, some of its principles will be taken for granted, disappearing from hermeneutic view. There is no telling what questions, if any, about Monteverdi and his epoch might seem pertinent in that world.